

The Effectiveness of Reading Techniques Used in a Saudi Arabian Secondary School Classroom as Perceived by Students and Teachers: A Study of Methods Used in Teaching English and their Effectiveness

Amel Al Nooh

Modern languages School, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences  
University of Hull, United Kingdoms

Marina Mosson-McPherson

Modern Language School, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences  
University of Hull, United Kingdoms

## Abstract

This paper describes a study conducted in Saudi Arabia regarding the effectiveness of currently employed strategies of teaching English reading skills in the country, taking into consideration the points of view both of teachers and students. The findings highlight significant discrepancies between the variously perceived usefulness of common strategies. Another problematic area identified is the lack of support mechanisms that should supplement the classroom teaching of reading skills. The paper makes certain recommendations towards furthering the teaching of *English reading skills to Saudi students*.

**Keywords:** EFL/ESL, English Language, Pedagogy, Reading Skills, Saudi Arabia

## Introduction

Reading is an extremely essential skill that equips individuals with the ability to interact with written texts. The ability to read allows one to attach meaning to written words thereby facilitating fluency and comprehension. There are numerous skills, which are extremely essential when it comes to grasping the ability to read. These include automatic recognition, synthesis and evaluation skills. Reading plays a significant role since it brings tremendous satisfaction to individuals through enabling them to be informed and enriched. Competence in reading makes it possible for readers to understand and learn how to attach meaning to various texts. In this paper, there is considerable focus on the development of English literacy and reading skills among secondary-level students in Saudi Arabia.

English is a foreign language in Saudi Arabia, which makes it pivotal for communication purposes. Being competent in English language refers to a situation whereby one can comprehend and interpret the meaning of written texts. Basal readers are extremely used in teaching English in the country's public learning institutions. This involves empowering the learners to read before introducing them to comprehension (Al-Jarf 2007). There are numerous other methods used in teaching foreign languages such as grammar translation method. This method is based on the assumption that studying vocabulary, grammar and sentence structure is crucial when it comes to understanding a foreign language. Communicative approach is yet another method of teaching and learning a foreign language. This method entails placing a lot of emphasis on the ability to interpret essential instructions written in foreign languages.

This evaluation intends to highlight pertinent issues concerning development of reading and literacy in English among students in Saudi Arabia. This paper presents a formative analysis of instructional designs for teaching English in Saudi Arabian schools. The paper also intends to demonstrate whether a basal reader is an effective technique of teaching and reading English as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia. In other words, this paper seeks to evaluate English reading competency among Saudi Arabian students and the various learning strategies used. The paper seeks to make an impact in improving the design of the learning strategies used to teach and learn English in Saudi Arabia.

## Background of the Study

It is essential for students and teachers to have an easy access to pertinent reading materials. This is mainly comprehending a foreign language is a difficult task that can only be made possible through matching the interests of students with appropriate learning materials. Contemporary reading tasks involve various phases, which include pre, while and post-reading stage. Pre-reading phase entails motivating students before engaging them in an actual reading exercise. This plays a pertinent role in aiding the activity of the appropriate schema, thereby facilitating the comprehension of a text. The *while-reading stage* is aimed at enhancing the ability of students to develop their linguistic and schematic knowledge too. *Post reading phase* on the other hand emphasizes the enhancement of learning comprehension through reference to matching exercises, cut-up sentences and comprehension questions.

Studies on the efficient teaching of reading skills have, in recent times, dwelt on the use of computers (MacGregor, 1988; Knaack, 2003; Johnson, Perry & Shamir, 2010) or considered the role of information technology, such as the Internet (Laborda, 2007). This paper takes into account those studies that deal with the impact of instructional design on the development of students' reading skills. It intends to conduct a formative or internal evaluation of the instructional designs or strategies for teaching English reading skills to Saudi Arabian secondary-

level students. The main purpose of this study is to enable teachers to monitor the progress of Saudi Arabian students when it comes to learning English. This study will also play a vital role in helping teachers to assess the suitability of their preferred teaching strategies.

Teachers in Saudi Arabia make use of different, reading strategies in order to enhance comprehension by students. It is essential to note that the teachers are exceptional when it comes to teaching about reading strategies. The teachers demonstrated the fact that they did not teach students how to establish the purpose of regular reading exercises. It is also essential to note that the students were not competent when it comes to generating questions concerning various texts in a consistent manner. The strategy of assessing the comprehension process was taught to Saudi Arabian students some of the time only as opposed to regularly. However, comprehension strategies are essential when it comes to enhancing reading processes.

According to Al-Jarf (2007), Saudi Arabian public schools (state schools in United Kingdom) use standardized basal readers to teach native students to read. The students are first made to learn to read, and then to comprehend. Teachers across Saudi Arabia use the same basal readers with students, cover the same texts and exercises, and follow the same teaching approaches (al-Jarf, 2007). The comparative effectiveness of this method is the issue that concerns this paper.

Reading competence enables one to undergo the process of understanding and constructing meaning from a piece of text (Zhao, 2009). Therefore, the improvement of reading competence among English as a foreign language/English as a second language (EFL/ESL) learners is a primary and overriding goal in the English-language pedagogy in Saudi Arabia. There is, therefore, an essential relationship between the strategies used by EFL teachers and the entire reading comprehension. Poor knowledge of English vocabulary is one of the key causes of difficulty in comprehension.

Both reading and comprehension are key elements when it comes to learning English among Saudi Arabian students. Different students including first grade (Year 10) have different reading styles in Saudi Arabian secondary schools. Whereas one student may benefit from a particular reading strategy, it might have a different impact on yet another student.

In the traditional grammar translation method of language teaching, the teacher interacts with the class in the mother tongue, with little active use of the target language. Vocabulary is taught in the form of isolated word lists; the rules of grammar, syntax, and inflection are given in the form of long and elaborate explanations; difficult classical texts are prescribed early; students are asked to translate disconnected sentences from the target language into the mother language; and pronunciation is neglected (Prator & Celce-Muria, 1979). This method has no theory, and no literature offers a rationale or justification to relate it to issues in linguistics, psychology, or educational theory (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). In this approach, low-level learners read only sentences and paragraphs generated by textbook writers and instructors, while the works of great authors are reserved for high-level students who have acquired appropriate language skills (Byrnes, 1998). In spite of these drawbacks, as Brown (2001) observes, the traditional method of teaching English reading skills continues to be used.

The communicative approach to language teaching and learning has given instructors a different understanding of the role of reading in the language classroom and the types of texts that can be used in instruction. When the goal of language instruction and learning is communicative competence, everyday materials such as train schedules, newspaper articles, and travel and tourism websites become appropriate classroom materials. To be able to read them is one way of developing an EFL/ESL communicative competence. This is because instruction in

reading and reading practice is viewed as an essential part of language teaching at every level (Byrnes, 1998).

In broad strokes, the grammar translation method and the communicative approach to teaching language skills, particularly reading skills, indicate the complexity of the enterprise of teaching reading skills. The success of that enterprise is also difficult to measure, since there are different ways of testing reading ability, and different reading standards also have differing opinions regarding the very definition of literacy. The question of selecting the right method, strategy, approach or intervention relative to reading and teaching reading skills in particular situations involving various possible learners is hotly debated.

The present paper describes a study and shares findings from it regarding the reading competency of Saudi Arabian secondary-level students and the learning strategies and materials employed in their instruction. It determines the students' reading skill levels, evaluates the current pedagogical strategies adopted by public secondary schools, and suggests pedagogical interventions to further improve the teaching of reading skills among Saudi Arabian English readers.

### **Actual Study**

The study involved thirty (30) first-grade (year 10) secondary-level students in a state school in Saudi Arabia, and four (4) secondary-level English reading teachers. The students are of the same age (16-18) and are all females; the teachers on the other hand are of different ages, and expertise levels but all are females

The study made use of triangulation research: that is, it employed both qualitative and quantitative research approaches in studying the current reading competence or skill level of the students and in evaluating the teachers' pedagogical strategies in teaching reading skills.

The quantitative research approach necessitated the use of survey questionnaires for both the student and the teacher-participants. Partly patterned after the checklists pertinent to the effectiveness of instructional design (Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, 2010) and partly on the can-do statements delineated by the Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE), the survey questionnaire for the students consisted of sections on their self-assessment as English readers, their perception of the teaching of reading strategies by their teachers, their evaluation of the post-reading activities they are made to go through, their reading activities at home either doing self-initiated reading or completing the homework assigned by their mentors, and their motivation in learning to read in English.

The survey questionnaire for the teacher-participants was oriented towards gathering pertinent baseline information about them in their role as secondary-level English reading teachers. The students' self-assessment of their reading skills was validated through the review conducted by the teachers. The teachers were asked to indicate the frequency of their use of different reading teaching strategies, post-reading activities, and reading comprehension strategies. They were also asked to elaborate on their style of assessing the reading skills of their students. Finally, they were posed the question of how well they collaborated with the parents of their students with the end view of soliciting their help and support in raising the students' reading competence level.

The qualitative approach was made through interviews and focus-group discussions (FGD) designed to supplement the information gathered through the survey questionnaires. The interviews were scheduled with individual students; the FGD was conducted involving seven students. The teacher-participants were qualitatively evaluated through direct observation of their

teaching activity. This is mainly because the questionnaires were administered in English, which explains the significance of the need to grasp the questions.

The data collected from the above sources were subjected to descriptive statistical analysis, yielding simple summaries. Univariate statistical analysis was used to summarize the frequency of participants' answers, and the determination of the estimated centre of the distribution of the values of the variables was carried out through simple averaging.

***Findings: baseline information about the teachers***

All four (4) teacher-participants in this study held degrees/the required academic qualifications necessary for teaching. They had spent varying numbers of years teaching in the school, with various amounts of exposure to opportunities for professional development (Table 1).Table 1:

**Table 1.** *The teacher-participants*

Teacher-participant	Years in the teaching profession	Recent professional advancement training	Self-updating
A	6–10	One 10-hour seminar	Sometimes reads books or professional journals on teaching in general. Often reads books and professional journals on teaching reading in particular. Reads English magazine articles for leisure.
B	16–20	One Six-hour in-service workshops directly on teaching reading skills	Sometimes reads books or professional journals on teaching in general. Never reads books or professional journals on teaching reading in particular. Reads English novels and short stories.
C	16–20	(No answer)	Sometimes reads books or professional journals on teaching in general. Sometimes reads books and professional journals on teaching reading in particular. Reads English magazine articles for leisure.
D	20+	One Six-hour in-service workshops directly on teaching reading skills	Sometimes reads books or professional journals on teaching in general. Reads English novels and short stories. Rarely reads books or professional journals on teaching reading in particular.

***Findings: the English reading students***

This study saw no need to focus upon obtaining baseline information regarding the participating English reading students, but the participants were asked to complete a self-assessment (Table 2). The ALTE's can-do statements are notably ranked from the easiest to the hardest. The student-readers were expected to rate themselves as readers as defined in the ALTE

scale. That is, they were expected to agree generally, for instance, that they could read basic notices and understand the general meaning of a simplified textbook or article, which is a higher level of reading activity than merely being able to understand basic instructions and messages with help. It is crucial to note that the self assessment pointed out that the students did not entirely perceive themselves as readers on the basis of the ALTE scale. By and large, the result of this self-assessment by the students indicates that the majority of the students are indeed on the level where they might be expected to be, given the nature of their academic training.

**Table 2.** *The English readers' self-assessment viz. the ALTE's can-do statements, where F denotes the number of respondents; F=Number of students.*

Item No.	Statement	Agreement degree								Mean	Degree
		Yes		Some-times		Rarely		No			
		F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
3	I can understand basic instructions and messages – for example, library catalogues – with help.	22	73.3	7	23.3	1	3.3	-	-	3.7	1
1	I can read basic notices and instructions.	23	76.7	3	10	4	13.3	-	-	3.6	2
2	I can understand the general meaning of a simplified textbook or article, reading very slowly.	18	60	6	20	4	13.3	2	6.7	3.34	3
5	I can read quickly enough to cope with an academic course.	15	50	10	33.3	4	13.3	1	3.3	3.3	4
6	I can access all sources of information quickly and reliably.	8	26.7	17	56.7	4	13.3	1	3.3	3.06	5
4	I can scan texts for relevant information and grasp the main point of a text.	5	16.7	18	60	6	20	1	3.3	2.9	6

The self-assessment by the students with regard to their reading competence is validated by the teachers (Table 3). The majority of the students are well within the expected level of their reading competence.

**Table 3.** *Teachers' evaluation of the students viz. the can-do statements*

Can-do statements	No. of students	Percentage
Can read basic notices and instructions.	28	95%
Can understand basic instructions and messages - for example, library catalogues - with some help.	26	85%
Can understand the general meaning of a simplified textbook or article, reading very slowly.	24	80%
Can scan texts for relevant information and grasp the main point of a text.	21	75%
Can access all sources of information quickly and reliably.	18	60%
Can read quickly enough to cope with the demands of an academic course.	10	35%

Practically, according to the teachers' assessment, and using the ALTE gauge, the majority of the students were already within the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) definition of an independent English user: that is, within categories B1 and B2. The teachers also indicated that there were at least 10 students – comprising 35% of the class – who were even more advanced in their language skills.

When asked to identify their own reading problems, most students (21, constituting 70% of the participants) reported that lack of concentration was the greatest hurdle they faced. Being a central factor in determining the ability to read quickly and effectively, concentration is a prerequisite for retention. Lack of retention gives one an experience of reading something through to the bottom of the page, yet not being able to remember what one has read. It is often mistakenly blamed on one's memory, but the real reason is poor concentration during reading (Turner, 2005).

The next most common problem, according to the students' self-assessment, was comprehension. There were 14 students (46.7% of the participants) who can relate to the problem. Defined as the level of understanding of any writing, reading comprehension depends on the ability to recognize words quickly and effortlessly. Without this ability, students use much of their processing capacity to read individual words, which interferes with their ability to synthesize and comprehend what is being read (Adams, 1994). Asked to elaborate on their lack of concentration and difficulty in comprehension, the students complained that the texts they were given to read were not interesting, and the procedure for their reading lessons was unchanging and inflexible.

Eight of the students (26.7%) identified lack of speed as their greatest problem. The speed or rate of reading is determined by reading fluency (Mather & Goldstein, 2001). It is defined as the ability to read connected text rapidly, smoothly, effortlessly, and automatically with little conscious attention to the mechanics of reading such as decoding (Meyer & Felton, 1999). It is the key to skilled reading (Ehri, 1998).

Finally, five students (16.6%) stated that their major problem was lack of retention. Retention in reading is the ability to remember what has been read. It is essential when it comes to organization and summary of the content and having it readily connect to what the readers already know. It is about storing information in one's long-term memory, and calling upon it and applying it as and when needed.

Confirming that the English reading students indeed have varying kinds and degrees of reading problems, the teachers divulged the number of students who receive remedial instruction in reading. One teacher disclosed that there are five (5) students in curative instruction in English reading. Another teacher revealed that there are fifteen (15) students who receive remedial reading instruction. The other two teachers did not provide data on this point.

It was apparent from the responses that the students' primary motivation for learning English is pragmatic. They are convinced that being able to read English would give them an advantage over those who are unable to do so. They also expressed the opinion that the ability to read English would help them in their studies.

#### ***Findings: teaching strategies***

Table 4 below presents a diagram of the different strategies adopted by the teachers for teaching English reading skills, and the consistency with which these strategies are employed in the classroom. The teachers were observed to follow the psycholinguistic and behaviorist models in their classroom instruction. Their procedure reflected the purposeful task-based nature of the reading lesson (Williams, 1986; Day & Bamford, 2002). They encouraged the students to make use of what they have read, e.g., through the completion of diagrams and mind maps, among other tools.

**Table 4.** *Reading teaching strategies used by the teacher-participants*

Teaching strategies	Consistency level								Average	Order
	Often		Sometimes		Rarely		Never			
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
Reading aloud to the class.	3	75.0	1	25.0	-	-	-	-	3.8	1
Teaching students strategies for decoding sounds and words.	3	75.0	1	25.0	-	-	-	-	3.8	1
Teaching students new vocabulary systematically.	3	75.0	1	25.0	-	-	-	-	3.8	1
Helping students understand new vocabulary in texts they are reading.	3	75.0	1	25.0	-	-	-	-	3.8	1
Asking students to read aloud to the class.	2	50.0	2	50.0	-	-	-	-	3.5	2
Asking students to read silently on their own.	2	50.0	2	50.0	-	-	-	-	3.5	2
Teaching or Modeling for students different reading strategies, e.g., skimming, self-monitoring.	2	50.0	2	50.0	-	-	-	-	3.5	2
Giving students time to read books of their own choosing.	-	-	2	50.0	1	25.0	1	25.0	2.3	3
Asking students to read aloud to the class.	-	-	1	25.0	2	50.0	1	25.0	2	4
Asking students to read along silently while other students read aloud.	-	-	2	50.0	-	-	2	50.0	2	4



To complement their pedagogical strategies, the teachers were found to use different resources in teaching English reading. The most frequently used resources by the greatest number of teachers are workbooks and/or worksheets and reading material from the Internet. Textbooks and reading series, such as basal readers and graded readers, are next. They also include supplementary material such as newspapers, magazines, and computer software among the readily available resources for English reading classes. Three teachers disclosed that they used material produced by the students themselves for reading instruction (see Table 5). Whereas the teachers gave exceptional answers, it was extremely clear that the teachers rarely held unanimous views. This is evident and goes on to illustrate that one teacher was notoriously opposed to the other three colleagues. This illustrates the fact that despite the fact that a majority of teachers have a popular view, some key players are opposed to the system.

Table 6 shows the comparative helpfulness of the different teaching strategies as perceived by the students. It appears that students find learning to decode sounds and words the most helpful technique in developing reading skills. Being allowed the time and opportunity to read books of their own choosing; listening to the teacher as he/she reads aloud to the class; receiving help in understanding new vocabulary; being taught new vocabulary systematically; reading aloud in class; reading silently on their own; reading silently as one of their classmates reads aloud; learning different reading strategies; and reading aloud in small groups are the other techniques they commented upon, serialized above according to a descending order of helpfulness (from the students' perspective).

Asked to elaborate on their perception of the activity of reading aloud in class, some participants in the group discussion remarked that they disliked it because they were afraid of making mistakes. This concern was strong enough to override their pride in listening to their own voices reading English. They also said reading aloud hindered, rather than helped, their understanding of the text, because they tended to concentrate on the sound that they produced, and not on the meaning of the text. On the other hand, when asked to read silently and/or try to answer comprehension questions, the (weaker) students often resorted to locating words from the question in the reading passage and simply copying the sentence containing that word and submitting that as the answer. Obviously, this defeats the purpose of the exercise.

The observation and group discussion sessions revealed that the students had a great deal to say, for instance, on the teachers' conduct in class. Mostly, the students complained about the opacity of lesson objectives and the desultory approach of the teachers. They reported that these problems resulted in their getting lost in the discussion. The teachers did not deny the problems, but shifted the blame to time limitations. A 45-minute session every two weeks is not a long enough time to apply appropriate methods of teaching reading skills, they stated, and neither is it adequate for sustaining the students' motivation at the optimal level.

**Table 5.** Resources used by teachers for reading instruction

Teaching resources	Agreement mark								Average	Order
	Often		Sometimes		Rarely		Never			
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
Workbooks or worksheets.	3	75.0	1	25.0	-	-	-	-	3.75	1
Reading materials from the Internet, e.g., websites.	3	75.0	1	25.0	-	-	-	-	3.75	1
Textbooks.	2	50.0	1	25.0	-	-	-	-	3.66	2
Reading series, e.g., basal readers and graded readers.	2	50.0	1	25.0	-	-	-	-	3.66	2
Materials from other subjects.	2	50.0	2	50.0	-	-	-	-	3.5	3
Newspapers and magazines.	1	25.0	1	25.0	1	25.0	-	-	3.0	4
Computer software for reading instruction, e.g., DVDs and CDs.	-	-	4	100.0	-	-	-	-	3.0	4
Materials written by students.	1	25.0	1	25.0	1	25.0	1	25.0	2.5	5

**Table 6.** Effective teaching strategies as evaluated by the English readers

Statement	The level of agreement								Mean	Rating
	Very helpful		Helpful		Sometime s helpful		Never helpful			
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
You are taught to decode sounds and words.	24	80.0	4	13.3	1	3.3	1	3.3	3.7	1
You are given time to read books of your own choosing.	20	66.7	6	20.0	4	13.3	-	-	3.53	2
You listen as the teacher reads aloud to the class.	19	63.3	6	20.0	4	13.3	1	3.3	3.43	3
You are helped to understand new vocabulary in the text you are reading.	17	56.7	7	23.3	5	16.7	1	3.3	3.33	4
You are taught new vocabulary systematically.	14	46.7	8	26.7	8	26.7	-	-	3.20	5
You read aloud in class.	12	40.0	10	33.3	6	20.0	1	3.3	3.13	6
Silently, you read on your own.	12	40.0	9	30.0	8	26.7	1	3.3	3.06	7
You read along silently as your classmate reads aloud.	7	23.3	14	46.7	8	26.7	-	-	2.96	8

You are taught different reading strategies: scanning, skimming and self-monitoring.	6	20.0	11	36.7	13	43.3	-	-	2.76	9
You read aloud in small groups.	3	10.0	5	16.7	12	40.0	10	33.3	2.03	10

Table 7 below presents the students' perception of the comparative helpfulness of different post-reading strategies and activities as prescribed by the teachers.

**Table 7.** *Helpfulness of post-reading strategies as perceived by students*

Statement	The level of agreement								Mean	Rating
	Very helpful		Helpful		Sometimes helpful		Never helpful			
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%		
Answering reading comprehension questions about what you have just read.	20	66.7	8	26.7	2	6.7	-	-	3.6	1
Answering oral questions about or orally summarizing what you have just read.	15	50.0	12	40.0	2	6.7	1	3.3	3.36	2
Doing a project about what you have read, e.g., a play or a piece of art.	14	46.7	8	26.7	6	20.0	2	6.7	3.13	3
Talking with your classmate about what you read.	10	33.3	8	26.7	12	40.0	-	-	2.93	4
Writing something about or in response to what you have read.	9	30.0	7	23.3	13	43.3	1	3.3	2.8	5
Taking a written quiz about what you have read.	4	13.3	11	36.7	11	36.7	4	13.3	2.53	6

**Findings: supplementary activities**

The teachers assign specific activities to supplement the English reading experience of the students, as presented in Table 8, ranked according to the frequency of their use by the teachers. The significance of this information lies in the lesson that Table 7 demonstrates. Normally, the choice of strategy for teaching reading skills is a teacher's judgment call, as informed by his or her professional training and individual preference. However, in the context of Tables 6 and 7, which disclose the students' evaluation of the pedagogical methods, Table 8 becomes particularly relevant in achieving a balance between the teachers' judgment and the students' demands.

**Table 8:** *Supplementary activities for English reading students; F=Number of teachers.*

Strategies	Consistency of marks								Order
	Often		Sometimes		Rarely		Never		
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	
Looking up information on the Internet.	4	100	-	-	-	-	-	-	1
E-mailing or chatting with other students about what they are learning.	3	75.0	1	25.0	-	-	-	-	2
Using instructional software to develop reading skills and strategies.	1	25.0	3	75.0	-	-	-	-	3
Reading stories or other texts on a computer.	-	-	4	100	-	-	-	-	4
Using a computer to listen to stories or other texts.	1	25.0	1	25.0	2	50.0	-	-	5
Using the Internet to do projects with students in other schools or countries.	1	25.0	1	25.0	-	-	2	50.0	6

### ***Discussion and conclusion***

It appears from the above data that by the teachers' evaluation, at least 80% of the Saudi Arabian student-participants in this study are already at CEFR A2 level, or the Waystage level in ALTE (2002, p. 8). This is significant because it justifies their being in secondary school, where English is taught as a second language (Ardan, 1991). On the other hand, the fact that just 80% of the students are at Waystage parallels the disclosure by the teachers that there are a number of students who are currently receiving remedial instruction in reading.

The readers' perception of themselves essentially corresponds to the evaluation by their teachers. The first three statements that students agreed to correspond to the skills expected from the CEFR basic users and threshold level (B1) of the independent level. It is pertinent to note that other statements were randomly arrived at by students. In addition to that, majority of the students agreed that they possessed more C1 and C2 skills as compared to B2 skills. It is essential to appreciate the fact that the teachers' assessment reveals that the English readers' skill levels meet the requirements for successful pursuit of academic studies. This point to the assertion that the readers are being schooled in English. However, the assessment conducted on the students shows that a substantial percentage of the students do not consider themselves as competent readers.

Based on Sessa's (2005) idea that students learn better when they like the teaching strategy, it is significant that both parties agreed that teaching students to decode sounds and words and the teacher reading aloud to the class are very helpful techniques. However, insofar as the other strategies are concerned, the teachers and the students seem to be in disagreement. One example is the contrary views regarding the helpfulness of allowing students to read books of their own choosing. Thus it would appear that many strategies adopted by Saudi Arabian English teachers are deficient in effectiveness if evaluated on the basis of students' feedback.

On the subject of allowing students to read texts of their own choice, it can be said that encouraging extensive reading is regarded as a helpful strategy in ESL/EFL (Day & Bamford, 2002; Krashen, 2005; Greenberg et al., 2006). It has been found that rapid or extensive reading exposes students to the myriad lexical, syntactic, and textual features of reading materials (Hafiz & Tudor, 1989). Letting students choose their own texts can only promote extensive reading.

The quality of learning is directly dependent upon the competence of teachers (Sanders & Rivers, 1996). The significance of teachers in the overall pedagogical set-up and process is held to be greater than that of the socio-economic background of the students, the characteristics of the whole school or system, the gender of the teacher, and other pertinent factors in determining the students' schooling outcomes (Rowe, 2003).

While the competence and experience of the teacher-participants is not in doubt, it must be mentioned that the school is deficient in terms of support systems for reading competence. As attested to by the teachers, the school has no other professionals to assist the reading learners, and no learning specialists or speech therapists. There are also an insufficient number of guide books for teachers. This often compels the teachers to be creative in helping those who fall behind. While these strategies usually work, it would certainly have been more effective to have proper support mechanisms to supplement classroom instruction. Many studies suggest that students benefit from working jointly with speech and language therapists and classroom teachers (Baxter et al., 2009).

Given the above, this paper makes the following strategy recommendations for the better teaching of reading skills to Saudi secondary-level students. First, the teachers should capitalize on the pragmatic motivation of readers related to their learning to read in English. English readers have a competitive edge, not only in their studies, but also in the labor and job markets. With the expansion and diversification of the Saudi economy, English users are likely to be given progressively greater preference, especially in matters of foreign trade and relations.

Secondly, teachers should initiate an environment conducive to reading, which Alsamadani (2008) finds to be an important lack affecting Saudi Arabian EFL/ESL learners' reading comprehension. The creation of a reading-conducive environment would also depend on support mechanisms for English reading. Besides the employment of learning specialists or reading therapists, schools should also establish English reading laboratories and involve these in the English reading curriculum.

Studies on the rapidity of acquisition and success of students learning to read on account of the teaching methods have produced equivocal results (Harrison, 1996). It seems obvious from the present study that there is a discrepancy in the perception of the utility of different teaching strategies. Without trying to determine whose perception in the matter is closer to the truth, it should be emphasized that teachers need to consider student viewpoints for the sake of initiating a dialogue with them that can only be beneficial in the long run. Especially valuable would be their adoption of the rapid or extensive reading method, which has been established as helpful in learning a second language. This, of course, should not be done at the expense of lexical or grammatical improvement. Reading skills alone cannot compensate for the lack of fundamental language skills, and amount to little without comprehension (Nuttall, 1982). Following Wasserman (2009), this paper suggests that instead of relying on the good will of teachers in implementing the above suggestions and recommendations, there may be a need for training programs that are not "business as usual" pedagogies.

Limitations of the study include the small size and homogeneity of the sample – 30 students and four teachers from a certain public secondary school – which sets limits upon its

generalizability. Likewise, the validity and reliability of the instrument that was used in this study still needs to be improved. It may serve succeeding researchers to correlate the instruments with other standard instruments, if any, employed by similar studies. Further, there is the possibility that the research participants might have been influenced by the Hawthorne effect, the halo effect, and subject expectancy, which are the usual biases at play in this kind of study (Brown, 1988). However, there is no reason either in favor of or against supposing that such limitations significantly influenced the results.

The study has brought to the surface several issues pertinent to instructional strategies for EFL/ESL readers. Its inability to establish whether the teachers and the students jibe in their perceived utility of the several pedagogic techniques and materials is itself an interesting outcome. Alsamadani (2008) has already established that gender does play a role in reading skills development in students, with girls doing somewhat better than boys, particularly in Saudi Arabia. It may be interesting and useful to try to determine whether the gender of teachers is a significant variable as well.

While the study was unable to establish how the different methods of teaching reading skills are effective, it was nonetheless able to pinpoint the delimiting factors on the instructional methods to reach the desired achievement by the students in reading and to meet the readers' needs. Succinctly put, to produce fuller and more effective instructional methods, Saudi Arabia needs teachers who are better equipped to manage the learning process within the classroom, and also a supportive school environment comprising a curriculum that puts a premium on the development of the students' reading competence.

#### About the Authors:

**Amel Al Nooh:** PhD candidate, Modern languages school, University of Hull, UK. Lecturer for Arabic Passport. University of Hull. MA TESOL and Applied Linguistics, UCLan, UK, 2010. English language supervisor in the Ministry of Education. English teacher for of secondary schools 13 years in Saudi Arabia. Bachelor degree from King Saud University, the field of translation, 1994.

**Professor Marina Mozzon-McPherson,** Head of Modern Languages School in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Hull, UK and is the Regional Director of Routes into languages programme (Yorkshire and the Humber Consortium) and the Principal investigator of two European projects: JOYN and EUROVERSITY

#### References

- Abdulrahman Abdulaziz Abdan (1991). An Exploratory Study of Teaching English in the Saudi Elementary Public Schools' *System*, 19 (3), pp. 253-266
- Adams, M.J. (1994). *Beginning to read: thinking and learning about print*. Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology.
- Alsamadani, H.S. (2008). *The relationship between Saudi EFL college-level students' use of reading strategies and their EFL reading Comprehension* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Ohio University, Curriculum and Instruction Reading Arts and Language Arts Education [Unpublished Material]).
- Association of Language Testers in Europe (ALTE) (2002) *The ALTE can do project: articles and can do statements produced by the members of ALTE 1999-2002*. Retrieved from: [http://www.alte.org/cando/alte\\_cando.pdf](http://www.alte.org/cando/alte_cando.pdf)
- Baxter, S., et al. (2009) Speech and language therapists and teachers working together: exploring the issues *Child Language Teaching and Therapy*, 25(2), pp. 215-234
- Brown, H. D. (2001). *Teaching by principles: an interactive approach to language pedagogy*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. New York: Pearson Longman.
- Brown, J. D. (1988). *Understanding Research in Second Language Learning* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

- Byrnes, H. (1998). Reading in the Beginning and intermediate college foreign language class. In G.S. Burkart (Ed.) *Modules for the Professional preparation of teaching assistants in foreign languages* Washington, D.C.: Center for Applied Linguistics.
- Day, R. R. & Bamford, J. (2002) Top Ten Principles for teaching Extensive Reading *In a Foreign Language*, 14, pp. 136-141.
- Ehri, L. C. (1998). Word Reading by sight and by Analogy in beginning Readers. In C. Hulme & M. Joshi (eds.), *Reading and spelling: development and disorders*, p. 87-112. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- “Evaluation of Course Materials,” (2010) Available at:  
[http://ieeec.com/publications\\_standards/publications/subscriptions/prod/mdl/evaluation\\_checklist.html](http://ieeec.com/publications_standards/publications/subscriptions/prod/mdl/evaluation_checklist.html)
- Greenberg, D. Rodrigo, V., Berry, A. Brinck, T., & Joseph, H. (2006). Implementation of an Extensive Reading Program with Adult Learners *Adult Basic Education: An Interdisciplinary Journal for Adult Literacy Educational Planning*, 16(2), pp. 81-97.
- Hafiz, F. M. & Tudor, I. (1989) Extensive Reading and The Development of language Skills *ELT Journal*, 43(1), pp. 4-13
- Harrison, C. (1996). Methods of teaching reading: key issues in research and implications for practice. *Interchange*, 39, pp. 1-12.
- Instructional Design, [n.d.] Retrieved from: <http://www.instructionaldesign.org/>
- Johnson, E. P. Perry, J. & Shamir, H. (2010) Variability in reading ability gains as a function of computer-assisted instruction method of presentation *Computers & Education*, 55(1), pp. 209-217
- Knaack, L. (2003). Elements of Effective Instructional Design for Elementary Mathematical Problem Solving Computer Software In C. Crawford et al. (eds.), *Proceedings of Society for Information Technology & Teacher Education International Conference 2003* (pp. 2921-2924). Chesapeake (VA): AACE.
- Krashen, S. (2005) Free voluntary reading: new research, applications and controversies. In `G. Poedjosoedarmo (Ed.) *Innovative Approaches to Reading and Writing Instruction* Singapore: SEAMECO Regional Language Center
- Laborada, J. G. (2007). Teaching Reading skills in a foreign language *Reading in a Foreign Language*, 19(2), pp. 162-166
- MacGregor, S. K. (1988). Instructional design for computer-mediated text systems: effects of motivation, learner control and collaboration on reading performance. *Journal of Experimental Education*, 56(3), pp. 142-147.
- Mather, N., & Goldstein, S. (2001). *Learning disabilities and challenging Behaviors: a guide to intervention and classroom management*. New York: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.
- Meyer, M. S. & Felton, R. H. (1999) Repeated Reading to Enhance Fluency: old approaches and new directions. *Annals of Dyslexia*, 49, 283-306.
- Nuttall, C. (1982). *Teaching Reading Skills in a Foreign Language* London: Heinemann Educational.
- Nuttall, C. (2005). *Teaching Reading Skills in a Foreign Language*, 3<sup>rd</sup> Ed. Oxford: MacMillan.
- Prator, C., & Celce-Muria, M. (1979) An Outline of Language Teaching Approaches. In M. Celce-Murcia & L. McIntosh (Ed.), *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* Rowley (MA): Newbury House.
- Reima Al-Jarf (2007). Developing Reading and Literacy in Saudi Arabia Retrieved from:  
[http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content\\_storage\\_01/0000019b/80/30/b1/95.pdf](http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/30/b1/95.pdf)
- Richards, J., & Rodgers, T. (1986) *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Rowe, K. (2003). The Importance of Teacher Quality as a Key Determinant of students’ experiences and outcomes of Schooling. *Building Teacher Quality: What Does The Research Tell Us? Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) Conference 2003* Retrieved from:  
[http://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=research\\_conference\\_2003](http://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=research_conference_2003).
- Sanders, W. L., & Rivers, J. C. (1996) *Cumulative and Residual Effects of Teachers on Future Student Academic Achievement* Knoxville: University of Tennessee Value-Added Research and Assessment Center.
- Sessa, S. A. (2005). Strategies designed to promote active learning and student satisfaction. *Journal of College Teaching and Learning*, 2(4), pp. 17-26.
- Turner, H. (2005). *You can do it! A Guide for the Adult Learner and Anyone going back to School Mid-Career* Aberdeen (WA): Silver Lake Publishing.
- Williams, R. (1986). "Top Ten" Principles for Teaching Reading *ELT Journal*, 40(1), pp. 42-45
- Zhao, X. (2009) Investigate and evaluate online resources of reading comprehension test. *English Language Teaching*, 2(2), pp. 167-169.